



CONNECTING TO INNER WISDOM  
THROUGH JUNGIAN PSYCHOLOGY

Wilco Lensink, 2019

## 1. Pioneer of the mind

*“With a truly tragic delusion these theologians fail to see that it is not a matter of proving the existence of the light, but of blind people who do not know that their eyes could see. It is high time we realized that it is pointless to praise the light and preach it if nobody can see it. It is much more needful to teach people the art of seeing.” – Carl Jung*

Carl Gustav Jung was a Swiss physician and psycho-analyst who lived from 1875 – 1961 and who devoted much of his life to exploring the depths of the human mind.

For many years I have studied Jung’s intricate writings and ideas, an experience which has been a blessing, and it is through this text that I wish to share them with you. It is in this way that I hope to inspire people to learn “the art of seeing”.

In this writing I shall not dive too deeply into Jung’s life, rather I will focus on his ideas regarding the psyche. (If you are interested in knowing more about his life I highly recommend his autobiography, titled “Memories, Dreams, Reflections”)

Since you are checking out this piece I take it you already have an interest in the psyche and are not oblivious to the importance of psychic life, which is great! The psyche matters and I sincerely hope you will benefit from this material into which I have poured my soul (puns intended).

Jung took it upon himself to explore the phenomenon that is psyche and came up with many fascinating theories regarding it. Not only did he approach the

mind in a scientific manner but he was also an avid philosopher, for example interested in subjects like mythology and religion as well.

He advanced many concepts and theories that in today's world are deemed basic psychological knowledge, such as the "two types" – introverts and extroverts. As most of you will probably already know introverted people are more directed inward, preferring solitude and being with themselves, while extroverted people tend to be more outwardly focused, social and more at ease in company. A balance between these opposites was of course deemed most preferable.

Most people will probably be familiar with the concept of introverted and extroverted personality types, but the time in which Jung lived was a different time. We must understand that knowledge (and more specifically scientific knowledge) has grown exponentially over the last few decades. Over these decades all kinds of ideas have become common that once were not, back then they were new and had not yet been so clearly defined.

In his time Jung was a true pioneer of the mind, coming up not only with these now seemingly simplistic ideas, but with very advanced theories which even in today's world are complex, fresh, interesting and definitely worthy of our attention. He was interested in the common threads running through all myths, the mythemes or motifs that kept recurring... always exploring in depth the meaning inherent to these stories. How was it that similar myths arose all over the world, he wondered for example. Viewing these stories as symbolic renderings of psychic material he came to astonishing ideas which later on were sharpened into (scientific) theories — ones that still intrigue us to this very day.

Jung observed that (in his time) many were not aware of the role the psyche played in their everyday life; they seemed largely unconscious of the effect the mind played in one's experience of reality. Self-reflection was not very common, we might even say it's still a rare trait, that's why Jung once wrote that "people will do anything in order to avoid facing their own souls".

The materialistic worldview that we are taught in school [which states that everything can be explained in terms of matter] has rendered the reality of the mind into an ever more undervalued commodity, at best it's some sort of handy appendix of the brain. Jung believed that it was exactly this undervaluation of spiritual matters that is troubling the minds of people. He noted: "The majority of my patients consisted not of believers but of those who had lost their faith." This is probably why he came to regard a certain sense of spirituality as the cornerstone to experiencing meaning in life.

By spirituality I do not mean either this or that religion, or this or that philosophy, one may even view this cosmos as a deity in its own right; what I mean is admitting and committing to the idea that there is something that is bigger than us, that there is this "something" which dwarfs us and demands our respect.

The word religion itself implies a sort of reverence for a higher power, whatever this power may be or mean to us. Religion implies accepting the existence of something sacred, and having respect for the sacredness of this thing — this sacred entity may even be nature, the universe itself. Through contemplation we may come to regard this physical world of ours as something that is divine, as something that's sacred and meaningful, as a thing we must revere.

I personally feel that true spirituality is about gradually coming to see through the imperfections one may observe in things, to come to see the divine nature of reality hidden behind these "flaws" (or: obstacles). This outlook on life and the world to me is more beneficial than to regard all as meaningless, as I think Jung felt too: "I have treated many hundreds of patients. Among those in the second half of life — that is to say, over 35 — there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life."

By spirituality I also mean the ability to see or give meaning, the sense of there being a meaning to existence, whether it be inherent to it, created, or

projected onto it – this meaning may be anything that helps us cope with life's demands. Rather than viewing life's struggles as meaningless happenings that one must endure without any reason, Jung observed how humans who felt that their struggles – and life itself – are meaningful were more content.

This is why he wrote: "I have gradually learned to be cautious even in disbelief," for it's exactly this disbelief (or disillusionment) when it comes to the wonders of the world that will numb a person to the point of depression. "I shall not commit the fashionable stupidity of regarding everything I cannot explain as a fraud."

So, Jung argued for the importance of a spiritual outlook on life, any outlook that gave a sense of meaning. He was skeptical about being overly skeptical when it came to "things we cannot prove". In his words: "It is safe to say that every one of my patients fell ill because they had lost that which the living religions of every age have given their followers, and none of them has really been healed who did not regain it [a sense of spirituality]."

In one of the Buddhist scriptures Buddha points out that we should not ask whether "this or that" is true, but we must rather explore the effects of certain beliefs. If a purely materialistic worldview does not render our lives sufficiently meaningful, even though it may be proven to be true by scientific thinkers, should we discard all religious or spiritual matters just because they do not fit into this picture? Can't we have both?

Jung felt that this doing away with spirituality meant depriving ourselves of a valuable commodity: "Because we cannot discover God's throne in the sky with a telescope or establish (for certain) that a beloved father or mother is still about in a more or less corporeal form, people assume that such ideas are 'not true'. I would rather say that they are not 'true' enough, for these are conceptions of a kind that have accompanied human life from prehistoric times, and that still break through into consciousness at any provocation. "Modern man may assert that he can dispose with them, and he may bolster

his opinion by insisting that there is no scientific evidence of their truth. Or he may even regret the loss of his convictions. But since we are dealing with invisible and unknowable things (for God is beyond human understanding, and there is no means of proving immortality), why should we bother about evidence?

“Even if we did not know by reason our need for salt in our food, we should nonetheless profit from its use. We might argue that the use of salt is a mere illusion of taste or a superstition; but it would still contribute to our well-being. Why, then, should we deprive ourselves of views that would prove helpful in crises and would give a meaning to our existence?

“There is a strong empirical reason why we should cultivate thoughts that can never be proved. It is that they are known to be useful. Man positively needs general ideas and convictions that will give a meaning to his life and enable him to find a place for himself in the universe. He can stand the most incredible hardships when he is convinced that they make sense.”

Knowledge and especially the way in which scientific knowledge is portrayed in the media has created an illusion that mankind knows more about this universe than in all actuality is the case, which is killing a sense of wonder we might otherwise feel regarding the cosmos. Things seem or feel demystified, while the truth is that the true nature of this universe remains a mystery to this day.

We may describe phenomena, we may explain how things work, but the what and especially the why remain largely unknown. It is from this shocking truth that mankind would rather run away than face it. If we truly face the fact that we know little to nothing about this manifest universe – except for the stories we tell ourselves – we might end up shocked to our core, beyond frightened by the unfamiliarity of everything around us. We’d rather feel it’s all common, familiar and predictable, than all-out mystery.

To quote Jung: “Man, as we realize if we reflect for a moment, never perceives anything fully or comprehends anything completely. He can see,

hear, touch, and taste; but how far he sees, how well he hears, what his touch tells him, and what he tastes depend upon the number and quality of his senses. These limit his perception of the world around him.

“By using scientific instruments he can partly compensate for the deficiencies of his senses. For example, he can extend the range of his vision by binoculars or of his hearing by electrical amplification. But the most elaborate apparatus cannot do more than bring distant or small objects within range of his eyes, or make faint sounds more audible. No matter what instruments he uses, at some point he reaches the edge of certainty beyond which conscious knowledge cannot pass.”

The effect of the idea that material reality knows no real mystery, that all may be debunked and demystified, that there is no such thing as a spiritual dimension... this effect is one of utter hopelessness. Atop that there's the thought that all of life is some random accident which does not do us much good either.

Just as blind belief in religion is not helpful, so too will blind belief in science not hold up. The scientific worldview is pushing the religious one ever further into the background, while it may just be the case that we need a little bit of both, a bit of reason and a bit of belief.

This is what Jung had to say about this: “If I want to understand an individual human being, I must lay aside all scientific knowledge of the average man and discard all theories in order to adopt a completely new and unprejudiced attitude. I can only approach the task of understanding with a free and open mind, whereas knowledge of man, or insight into human character, presupposes all sorts of knowledge about mankind in general.

“It is the role of religious symbols to give a meaning to the life of man. The Pueblo Indians believe that they are the sons of Father Sun, and this belief endows their life with a perspective (and a goal) that goes far beyond their limited existence. It gives them ample space for the unfolding of personality and permits them a full life as complete persons. Their plight is infinitely

more satisfactory than that of a man in our own civilization who knows that he is (and will remain) nothing more than an underdog with no inner meaning to his life.”

Aside from the enrichment of one’s life that a sense of spirituality grants, Jung also had a different motive for examining the psyche. To state this motive in his own words: “...we are so full of apprehensions, fears, that we don’t know exactly to what it points... a great change of our psychological attitude is imminent, that is certain... we need more understanding of human nature because the only real danger that exists is man himself... and we know nothing of man – his psyche should be studied because we are the origin of all coming evil. We are the great danger. Psyche is the great danger. How important is to know something about it, but we know nothing about it.” If a person becomes aware of his own darkness through self-reflection he may come to terms with it, and it is this overcoming or coming to terms with the darkness that will in the end show us the light. Having overcome the darkness and having seen one’s inner light, man will probably be less prone to bomb the entire world to pieces.

As I mentioned before, Jung did not pick favorites when it came to religion — rather, his point was that humans have forgotten to honor something that is bigger than us, whether it be a God or simply the majesty of this material world as some sort of soulful entity. People have become arrogant in their thinking. The idea that we are at the top of the chain of this universe will facilitate only the hubris that is the root of the fall.

Thus, the benefits of a spiritual outlook are twofold: it will bestow meaning upon a person’s life (1) and mankind in general will have a bigger chance at survival (2). This does not mean we don’t need science, for we must never stop curiously exploring. I mean to say that if we can somehow integrate the scientific and the spiritual worldview, then I believe we will be able to make the most of our existence.



## 2. Individuation

*“The privilege of a lifetime is to become who you truly are.” – Carl Jung*

### **The goal of psychological analysis**

The goal of psychological analysis in Jungian theory is to “grow up”, so to speak, to grow into a state of psychological maturity, which is reflected in the Jungian term ‘individuation’. The word individuation generally means the process of self-discovery through which a person becomes an individual, rather than a speck in the herd that is dominated by collective forces.

According to Jung, this is not an easy task: “The achievement of psychological maturity is an individual task, and so is increasingly difficult today when man's individuality is threatened by widespread conformity.”

In his text "Individual Dream Symbolism in Relation to Alchemy", Jung interprets about 80 dreams and places them in a context of describing a spiritual growth, a mental quest culminating in a highly desired result, namely: solving psychological conflict concerning meaning.

The interpretations are Jung's personal take on the dreams, slash, his projections onto the dream material that was presented to him, mixed with tons of references to older philosophies and literature – all of this in order to put forward a complex theory about there being a centralizing process unfolding in the psyche of all people.

This process is what he dubbed the "circumambulation of the center”.

Circumambulation means walking around a sacred object. The object represents a mystery; which is circled, pondered, all the while trying to figure out what it is and how one must approach it or relate to it. In the same way do

we circle ourselves, running away from our inner darkness, sometimes feeling like ourselves, at other times detached.

This process of "maturing selfhood" is universal, and not something special. Rather, it's a growing up of the mind that happens to all, though some people are more prone to work and reflect on it than others. Just like the body grows, so does the mind.

Usually an identity crisis of sorts or a feeling of hopelessness and meaninglessness, a feeling of chaos is the starting point of this "work" or "quest" which the initiate or querent must undertake. It encompassed not only a sublimation of the soul but also a decay and rebirthing process. This process did not mean that man would become unto god. Rather, man's ego, experiencing god-like attributes, would have to dive into and connect with the animal world of instinct, where our roots lie. These roots are sinister, so Jung always mentioned to be cautious.

However, the fact that this call to growth cannot simply be denied soon becomes clear, like Jung noted: "Deep down, below the surface of the average man's conscience, he hears a voice whispering, 'There is something not right,' no matter how much his rightness is supported by public opinion or moral code," and the reason for the feelings of unease is the following: "Our suffering comes from our unlived life -- the unseen, unfelt parts of our psyche."

That the feeling of a "life unlived" is detrimental to a person's mental well-being is not to be denied: "About a third of my cases are suffering from no clinically definable neurosis, but from the senselessness and emptiness of their lives. This can be defined as the general neurosis of our times. I have frequently seen people become neurotic when they content themselves with inadequate or wrong answers to the questions of life. They seek position, marriage, reputation, outward success or money, and remain unhappy and neurotic even when they have attained what they were seeking. Such people are usually confined within too narrow a spiritual horizon. Their life has not

sufficient content, sufficient meaning. If they are enabled to develop into more spacious personalities, the neurosis generally disappears.”

### **Collective consciousness vs. individuality**

Modern society has in a way robbed individuals of their individuality, for it is its often rigid structure which tends to inhibit a person to be brave enough to embody what one feels to be from the inside.

As Jung notes: “Loneliness does not come from having no people about one, but from being unable to communicate the things that seem important to oneself, or from holding certain views which others find inadmissible. [...] The mass State has no intention of promoting mutual understanding and the relationship of man to man; it strives, rather, for atomization, for the psychic isolation of the individual.”

It may be just because of the feelings of isolation that most feel a strong urge to fit in and belong, which gives rise to enormous demands of any person.

Atop that it is implicitly expected that we strive for dominion in order to prove ourselves a valuable member of society, and since no one wants to be on the bottom of the food chain, one feels pressured to strive for success at any cost. Even though there may be freedom of speech, it seems in a person’s best interest to not “swim against the current”, to hold the same principles and beliefs as the majority of a society, whether they be religious or scientific. We don’t want to feel even more alone by holding different views on reality.

All of the above cripples our sense of individuality. But, of course there’s always the “solace” that there’s a myriad of ways in which we may buy freedom, if only we work hard enough. And, if not freedom, then at least money will facilitate a distraction or two from aforementioned predicament. Consumer culture keeps people enveloped in an illusion that the price we pay (loss of individuality) is worth it, the whole “show” keeps one quiet and distracted from one’s feelings of discontentment.

Aside from fulfilling our primary needs, it is not uncommon to see people work “like crazy” to be able to afford distractions from their feelings of unease in their free time: to see a movie to have something to talk about, to buy this or that new technological gadget, to purchase a stellar new car or to go on vacation for weeks on end; which, most of the time - aside from facilitating the ability to impress others – one merely partakes in because one cannot stand the emptiness and meaninglessness of the whole situation. That this will in the end not do us much good is undeniable, as Jung states: “We no longer live on what we have, but on promises, no longer in the present day, but in the darkness of the future, which, we expect, will at last bring the proper sunrise. We refuse to recognize that everything better is purchased at the price of something worse; that, for example, the hope of greater freedom is canceled out by increased enslavement to the state, not to speak of the terrible perils to which the most brilliant discoveries of science expose us. The less we understand of what our forebears sought, the less we understand ourselves, and thus we help with all our might to rob the individual of his roots and his guiding instincts, so that he becomes a particle in the mass. [...] The infantile dream-state of the mass man is so unrealistic that he never thinks to ask who is paying for this paradise. The balancing of accounts is left to a higher political or social authority, which welcomes the task, for its power is thereby increased; and the more power it has, the weaker and more helpless the individual becomes.”

### **“If everybody jumps off a cliff...”**

In response to feelings of alienation it's not uncommon that strong collective ideals, codes of conduct, rules and regulations emerge, which in a way facilitate an illusion of community, while really they rather exist to keep people in “their proper place”, to not have people act out too unpredictably. There is however a danger that comes with a rigid collective structure, namely: ‘mob mentality’.

To quote Jung: “A group experience takes place on a lower level of consciousness than the experience of an individual. This is due to the fact that, when many people gather together to share one common emotion, the total psyche emerging from the group is below the level of the individual psyche. If it is a very large group, the collective psyche will be more like the psyche of an animal, which is the reason why the ethical attitude of large organizations is always doubtful. The psychology of a large crowd inevitably sinks to the level of mob psychology. If, therefore, I have a so-called collective experience as a member of a group, it takes place on a lower level of consciousness than if I had the experience by myself alone.”

When people are not taught to think for themselves but rather live the life imposed upon them from the outside, then this construct will often lead to desperation. In times of crises it may even lead to destruction, for what is “normal” merely means: that what the majority of people are doing.

That this is dangerous is of course perfectly illustrated by the happenings in Nazi Germany around the time of the second World War. People are highly influenceable, and the saying: ‘if everybody jumps off a cliff, would you do so as well?’ will then probably have to be answered with a yes.

Of these collective forces, which inevitably and invisibly tend to steer a person’s actions in a myriad of ways, Jung wrote the following:

“The change of character brought about by the uprush of collective forces is amazing. A gentle and reasonable being can be transformed into a maniac or a savage beast. One is always inclined to lay the blame on external circumstances, but nothing could explode in us if it had not been there. As a matter of fact, we are constantly living on the edge of a volcano, and there is, so far as we know, no way of protecting ourselves from a possible outburst that will destroy everybody within reach. It is certainly a good thing to preach reason and common sense, but what if you have a lunatic asylum for an audience or a crowd in a collective frenzy? There is not much difference between them because the madman and the mob are both moved by

impersonal, overwhelming forces.”

“It is under all circumstances an advantage to be in full possession of one's personality, otherwise the repressed elements will only crop up as a hindrance elsewhere, not just at some unimportant point, but at the very spot where we are most sensitive. If people can be educated to see the shadow-side of their nature clearly, it may be hoped that they will also learn to understand and love their fellow men better. A little less hypocrisy and a little more self-knowledge can only have good results in respect for our neighbor; for we are all too prone to transfer to our fellows the injustice and violence we inflict upon our own natures.

“Every individual needs revolution, inner division, overthrow of the existing order, and renewal, but not by forcing them upon his neighbors under the hypocritical cloak of Christian love or the sense of social responsibility or any of the other beautiful euphemisms for unconscious urges to personal power.”

### **Breaking free from mob mentality & turning inwards**

Since a person can become so enveloped in collective ideals, and atop that identify with so many collective ways of thinking and modes of being, it's hard to pinpoint just exactly what our individuality entails. What makes us into a unique human being, different from the mass? To quote Jung: “To find out what is truly individual in ourselves, profound reflection is needed; and suddenly we realize how uncommonly difficult the discovery of individuality is.”

The purpose of individuation is just that: to achieve a sense of individuality, aside from any vision others may hold. To examine all of these visions and to draw one's own conclusions in order to be able to think and act as grounded upon thorough understanding of oneself.

As Jung writes: “We should know what our convictions are, and stand for them. Upon one's own philosophy, conscious or unconscious, depends one's

ultimate interpretation of facts. Therefore it is wise to be as clear as possible about one's subjective principles. As the man is, so will be his ultimate truth.”

Aside from the laws that are imposed upon us from without there are also laws imposed from within, an inner feeling of how one should be living life, what one should do in order to feel truly content. Though choosing to walk one's own path is not always applauded, it is in all actuality a vital step on the path to becoming an individual, rather than being a puppet for the state, or an actor in the play of survival and power that we call society.

To get to know oneself a person must dig deep into his or her psyche, to make the unconscious conscious and greater self-knowledge. This process is often frowned upon by others as if a person who chooses to break free from collectivity is acting selfishly, while the truth may be that others feel jealousy when a person is brave enough to at least try to think for oneself and walk one's own path.

What Jung had to say about this was the following: “The fact that a man who goes his own way ends in ruin means nothing. He *must* obey his own law, as if it were a daemon whispering to him of new and wonderful paths. There are not a few who are called awake by the summons of the voice, whereupon they are at once set apart from the others, feeling themselves confronted with a problem about which the others know nothing. In most cases it is impossible to explain to the others what has happened, for any understanding is walled off by impenetrable prejudices. ‘You are no different from anybody else,’ they will chorus or, ‘there's no such thing,’ and even if there is such a thing, it is immediately branded as ‘morbid’. He is at once set apart and isolated, as he has resolved to obey the law that commands him from within.”

### **Sharing the boon of wisdom**

But, how does one go about this becoming an individual, like Jung is talking about? It would mean not a journey around the world but a journey inside.

The unconscious parts of ourselves, the darkness that is clear to others but not to ourselves - this must be integrated into our conscious life if we are to feel relieved from the influence these contents seem to have on us. In this way, our inner child can grow up.

That this does not entail “ego-death” but rather a healthy ego as regulating center of consciousness becomes clear when we consider Jung’s words: “It even seems as if the ego has not been produced by nature to follow its own arbitrary impulses to an unlimited extent, but to help to make real the totality-the whole psyche. It is the ego that serves to light up the entire system, allowing it to become conscious and thus to be realized. If, for example, I have an artistic talent of which my ego is not conscious, nothing will happen to it. The gift may as well be non-existent. Only if my ego notices it can I bring it into reality.”

In order to bring this process to fruition it is paramount to take a step back for a while in order to reflect on oneself fully, without any distractions from without; however, this retreat into oneself does not have to be a permanent state. In the end this genuine self-reflection and contemplation may actually bestow such insight and meaning to a person that he or she will be able to benefit society more than if the process never unfolded. As Jung stated: “His retreat into himself is not a final renunciation of the world, but a search for quietude, where alone it is possible for him to make his contribution to the life of the community. [...] I feel it is the duty of one who goes his own way to inform society of what he finds on his voyage of discovery.”

It is in this spirit that I shall now inform you, my reader, of my own findings.



### 3. Regarding the psyche

*“By psyche I understand the totality of all psychic processes, conscious as well as unconscious.” - Carl Jung*

#### **How may we define the psyche?**

Jung studied the psyche, as he called it. When we look up the word ‘psyche’ in the Online Etymology Dictionary, a dictionary detailing the origin of words, we find the following. It is a word that got its meaning of “animating spirit” in the 1640s. Psyche is originally a Latin word, derived from the Ancient Greek word *psykhē*, meaning: “soul”, or more tangibly “the invisible animating principle or entity which occupies and directs the physical body”. The psyche thus is roughly equivalent to what is today called the mind. By the word psyche Jung understood not merely what we usually mean when we say ‘consciousness’, or that of which we are aware at a given time (even our self-awareness), but rather the totality of all psychological processes, namely, both conscious as well as unconscious. (We will explore the unconscious mind in depth later).

The psyche is often called the “sixth sense”, which is because it is the point where sensory data entering the five material senses converges into a coherent experience of reality, one which we experience as the present moment. This sense-data - which may be thought of as a “primordial soup” of sorts - is converted into an ordered whole inside of our mind.

The word psyche is believed to be in a way related to a word for “breath”, for much as the “breath of life” sustains the body, so does the psyche sustain consciousness. Because we breathe we stay alive and conscious.

### **Consciousness, self-awareness & contemplation**

Consciousness is one very distinctive feature of the mind, it facilitates, as the word implies, the ability to be conscious. The word consciousness is etymologically derived from the words ‘com’ and ‘scire’, meaning “with, thoroughly” and “to know” -- we may say that the word implies “knowing that one knows”, conscious of being conscious, awake, alive, etc.

Contrast is at the base of perception, just as polarities are at the base of consciousness. We might say that being aware is to be able to discern between polarities, facilitating the capacity to experience a multiplicity of phenomena as discernible, rather than fully entangled as if some sort of pre-cosmogonic chaos. So, consciousness is able to perceive individual forms in a sea of information.

For example: we may discern between our self and others. This particular distinction generates self-awareness, to be aware of being an individual person... which implies the experience that our sensations, thoughts, feelings and intuitions are something personal, belonging to an “I”. By way of our consciousness we may reflect on this “me”, called self-reflection.

What we can deduce from this is that consciousness enables one to be aware of oneself and to reflect on this self, to contemplate oneself in self-reflexivity. It is through this form of meditation - which is not unlike focusing the mind onto a meditation object or koan - that self-knowledge is acquired.

### **Perception, attention, memory & personhood**

The word ‘system’ means ‘composition’, for example a computer system, which is a whole made up of interrelated parts. However, when used in a scientific context what is usually meant is, simply put: “that which is examined” -- hence, by way of an arbitrary border one part of the universe is separated from the rest. The reason why this separation is made is because otherwise there would be too much to take into account when investigating.

Our perception works in the same way: we create borders so that we may talk about individual objects, phenomena, people, ideas, etc.; if there was no experience of any boundary we would not be able to communicate or even be aware of any one thing in particular.

The faculty of attention is a way of only registering what at a certain moment feels of importance to a person. The reason why scientific predictions work is because they rely on a specific set of variables, describing only that which is within the system, and leaves others out of the equation. Our minds are very much like this. We may imagine this universe as a soup or field of sense-data, constantly bombarding our senses with information. We are however only conscious of a small part of it, namely that which we have focused our attention on. The capacity for awareness or directed attention is not limitless, so we are only aware of a small part of the whole of reality at once.

Memory is defined as the process by which information is encoded, stored and retrieved when necessary. To encode implies that complex information is converted into a simpler form, for example a complex soup of sense-data into a simplified subjective representation of said information inside one's mind. This representation of reality, or, our conscious experience, is then stored as a memory. Memory is key to survival, for by virtue of memory we know (for example) where to find water; which plants are poisonous and which are not; we can remember how to protect ourselves from threat, etc.

The main function of our memories is self-preservation, but since there is less threat in modern societies and we do not really have to think about where to find water or food, their main function has become a process by which we construct our personalities. It is through this process that a sense of individuality or 'personhood' emerges.

#### **Ego**

This "I", "me" or "myself" has been widely explored in the field of psychology, where it is usually called the "ego", which is Latin for "I". Jung

summarizes it thus: “We understand the ego as the complex factor to which all conscious contents are related. It forms, as it were, the center of the field of consciousness; and, in so far as this comprises the empirical personality, the ego is the subject of all personal acts of consciousness. The relation of a psychic content to the ego forms the criterion of its consciousness, for no content can be conscious unless it is represented to a subject.”

The ego is built out of identification with experiences, mental representations of these experiences, memories of past events and fantasies regarding a future time. It looks for ways to manifest itself through these identifications. How we ourselves experience this ego is called a self-image.

Jung makes a distinction between what he calls ego and personality. The ego, according to him, “rests” on the field of consciousness, but is not identical to it; it is only a point of reference through which consciousness is experienced. He makes it clear that the ego is only a part of the personality, the other portion is made up of features that are unconscious to a person and influence the ego in invisible ways.

In modern spiritual philosophies it is not uncommon to hear that the ego is an illusion, that it must face ego-death, that the obliteration of ego is necessary for spiritual growth. This is not what is stated in Jungian psychology; the ego here is an integral part of the psyche that – since it’s the point of reference for the field of consciousness - is necessary if there is to be any conscious awareness at all. One must rather learn to “employ it well”, rather than to dispose of it altogether.

### **Persona**

In order to distinguish oneself from others it is not uncommon to find a person “putting on exotic plumage”, as if these identifications were a sort of robe we put on to impress others, or perhaps a uniform that shows others what “we’re about”. The exquisite robe is what separates us from the rest, while the uniform may serve to feel part of a group, this is one way of

thinking about these symbols.

The carefully curated and highly limited part of our ego which is presented to others is what is known as the ‘persona’. Persona is a Latin word simply meaning person, but was also used as a term for a character in a play, characters that in ancient theater pieces usually wore masks. The masks signified which character was depicted, so the audience immediately knew who was who, so to speak. The persona is not unlike a mask that we put on to engage with others on the “world stage”.

In the worst case scenario one may fully identify with the persona and become somewhat of a caricature, even oblivious to the fact that there are layers of self behind the mask. However, if one is only a little aware of what goes on in his or her psyche, then surely a person will be aware that the mask one presents to the world does not always coincide with how one feels about oneself from the inside.

A void seemingly exists between what a person presents and what he or she feels to “be” from the inside, i.e., the ego-identifications that lay hidden behind the mask or persona. If we put on a mask we may feel like we are a deceiver of sorts, perhaps we become afraid that others will be able to peek behind the mask to see the “real” us.

This awareness of how one is “acting” rather than simply being may become a cradle of much stress. When this feeling of unease is not confronted then these contents will become repressed, suppressed or “split off” into the unconscious mind -- a subject I shall now dive into.

#### **Complexes & the unconscious mind**

When this process of “turning a blind eye” to certain aspects of oneself continues on a while without a person ever confronting it, these contents will start to give rise complexes, nowadays also known as schemas. These imply patterns that regulate our behavior of which we are oftentimes non-aware. They may not be harmful, but the word complex in a way alludes to their

“complex nature”, that often they produce unwanted effects to the extent where a person does not feel in control any longer. Because one is not conscious of the source of the problem one may start wondering: why am I always feeling so and so, why do I have these kind of thoughts regarding this or that subject, why do these particular memories keep coming up, etc.

To quote Jung: “Man's task is to become conscious of the contents that press upward from the unconscious. Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate. For the sake of mental stability and even physiological health, the unconscious and the conscious must be integrally connected and thus move on parallel lines. If they are split apart or ‘dissociated’, psychological disturbance follows.”

The one who originally came up with the theory of the unconscious mind was Freud, before that most were largely unconscious of large portions of their psyche being unconscious. To illustrate the idea we may ask ourselves the following questions: (1) When we walk, when we direct our bodies, how do we know how to do this? (2) When we are not consciously aware of memories, where are they stored? How are they retrieved? The answer is that these are unconscious processes. One of the functions of the unconscious mind is that we need not be aware of everything that is embedded and going on inside of our minds all at once, all the time.

Freud compared the psyche to an iceberg that is largely underwater, the top layer of the iceberg that is above water would be consciousness, while the largest part of the iceberg is underwater, the largest part of the psyche is unconscious. In Ancient Egyptian mythology we find an idea akin to this, as mirrored in the ‘benben’. By this benben was meant the mound that arose from the primordial waters, which was said to have turned into a small pyramid. Later on the term was used to signify the top stone of a pyramid, which were adorned with carvings and are thought to have been gilded. Symbolically the pyramid itself might represent the psyche, largely unconscious, having grown from the primeval beginning into what it would

later become. The benben would then represent consciousness, by virtue of which there is the possibility for coherence, for perception and language. This consciousness is an extremely important, but only a very small part of the whole structure.

Of the unconscious mind we may say it holds all psychic content that lies beneath the threshold of consciousness. To put in Jung's words:

"Theoretically, no limits can be set to the field of consciousness, since it is capable of indefinite extension. Empirically, however, it always finds its limit when it comes up against the unknown. This consists of everything we do not know, which, therefore, is not related to the ego as the center of the field of consciousness. The unknown falls into two groups of objects: those which are outside and can be experienced by the senses, and those which are inside and are experienced immediately. The first group comprises the unknown in the outer world; the second the unknown in the inner world. We call this latter territory the unconscious."

While to Freud this depository of hidden thoughts, feelings, memories, desires, etc. was mainly a source of much psycho-pathology, Jung regarded this to be different. For a time they were actual friends, sending each other lengthy letters and meeting up occasionally; in a way Jung admired Freud and his ideas. However, the friendship ended over a dispute that was based on a difference of opinion, namely one regarding the unconscious mind. Jung believe there was more to it than it just being a personal repository - or some "garbage can" - for unwanted psychic material. We shall look into this idea in the following chapter.

#### **Four functions of the psyche**

It is not uncommon to come across definitions of 'mind' that roughly equate it to thinking, or the capacity to be aware and to have thoughts; mind in this way seems somewhat equivalent to the intellect. Jung advanced the idea that

this way of viewing mind is faulty in ways.

He thought the four basic functions of the psyche to be: sensing, thinking, feeling and intuiting. To him the psyche was not just an ability to be aware of thought, a faculty of reasoning, but included awareness of sensations, thoughts regarding these sensations, feelings in response to these thoughts (or thoughts responding to feelings) as well as the ability for intuition.

Anyone may probably understand what a sensation is, what a thought is and what a feeling is. Not exactly what it *is* per se, but we all have sensations, we all have thoughts and feelings regarding these sensations. If we order these functions we may say that sensation is the most basic one, which tells us that there is something, then comes thinking, which tells us what it is. Feeling tells us, let's say, what to think of it - think of the idea of a "gut feeling" - a physical sensation that tells of what to think of a thing. The last of the four functions is a bit tougher to accurately describe or get a handle on.

Of intuition it may be said this is somewhat of a spiritual quality, which is sometimes thought of as the product of contemplation, or mental consideration, which may not always be a conscious process. It stands in contrast with sensation, though it shares the characteristic of being an "irrational function". Much like sensations are a given, in a sense that they are objective physical information entering our senses (which the mind then interprets and makes coherent), Jung wrote that intuition is a "knowing" like this from a psychic level. It is the ability to understand something instinctively, without the need for conscious reasoning. It is usually not clear how the knowledge was acquired.

Jung envisioned these four functions as a circular diagram, where sensation and intuition are opposed, and thinking and feeling as well. The upper half of the circle is in "the light", or is conscious, while the lower half is in the dark. The light functions are the superior functions in a person, and the functions that are in the dark are the unconscious ones, those a person may be less aware of or in touch with. In everyone this configuration shall be slightly different.



### **Object / Subject – distinction, representation & worldview**

The mind is usually thought of as the subject, hence the word “subjective experience”, i.e.: the experience of the object (physical reality) inside of the subject (consciousness). Each of us carries representations of this universe inside of that which has been experienced. We interpret them and then attach our own meaning to these experiences.

Jung described the process thus: “Whatever we look at, and however we look at it, we see only through our own eyes. It is my mind, with its store of images, that gives the world color and sound; and that supremely real and rational certainty which I can ‘experience’ is, in its most simple form, an exceedingly complicated structure of mental images. Thus there is, in a certain sense, nothing that is directly experienced except the mind itself.”

What Jung meant by this is that the soup of sensory data has no meaning and can’t be experienced or interpreted if there is not a subject making sense of these sense experiences. As was brought up before: the five senses come together inside of the “sixth sense”, the mind, which is where the entangled and perhaps chaotic sensations are integrated into a coherent whole made up of discernible phenomena. Like Jung wrote: “Everything is mediated through the mind, translated, filtered, allegorized, twisted, even falsified by it. We are enveloped in a cloud of changing and endlessly shifting images.”

Our thoughts and feelings thus are of a subjective nature, namely, part of the subject that is experiencing them. The object, matter - which may exist in a different form than that which we perceive, for example: atoms, waves, energy, etc. - is converted into a coherent sense-perception inside one’s mind. We store all of these perceptions inside of our psychic apparatus, this is what we call memory, and it’s these memories which give rise to a particular way of seeing things. We call this personal outlook on the world a worldview (though we may also speak of a more collective view of the world).

## 4. First encounter with the Shadow

*“The most terrifying thing is to accept oneself completely.” – Carl Jung*

### **Psyche as layered structure / expanding consciousness through self-reflection**

Over the course of decades and due to deep inner explorations Jung concluded that the psyche was made up of what we might call layers. The outside layer in this model would be the persona, behind which the ego is hiding. But beyond this ego lies a whole world, so to speak, hidden in the depths.

What one first encounters is what Jung called the personal unconscious: things which, by virtue of some effort, can quite easily be made conscious, and are personal, relating to oneself only. Even though it's easily made conscious, this confrontation is usually experienced as somewhat startling, since the hidden contents mainly consist of views regarding oneself and memories that one would rather not look at. When having come to terms with this, consciousness “expands” – self-reflection naturally enhances self-knowledge.

However, this personal unconscious is - according to Jungian thought - only a small part of the totality of the unconscious mind, to be precise it's part of a bigger subset of the psyche which Jung dubbed the ‘shadow’. Facing one's personal unconscious contents constitutes only the beginning of a deeper analysis of the psyche.

### **The Jungian shadow & psychological projection**

Jung defined the encounter with one's shadow as the "apprentice-piece" of psychological development. The Jungian concept of the shadow refers to contents in a person's psyche that are hidden from consciousness. Before self-reflection the totality of the unconscious mind is "in the shadows", it's hidden from conscious awareness. He wrote: "the shadow personifies everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself" – these contents include for example repressed thoughts, feelings, memories and desires. "The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and It therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance."

What we don't like about ourselves is usually repressed, difficult experiences we may have had, "strange" thoughts and feelings we may suffer from... all of it gets pushed away into "the depths" where it is stored. The problem with this is that these contents do not "go away", they are merely stored in the unconscious mind, from which they may pop up at any moment to come and torment consciousness.

To protect oneself from these undesirable invasions the contents are projected into the outside world, especially onto other people. If for example I am a very arrogant person but do not realize this then I will judge this quality in others, called 'projection'.

If there is only the slightest hint of some arrogance in another I will sink my teeth into this deeply and complain: "that person is just so damn arrogant!", constantly seeing in others that which I hide from myself. Why this happens is because in reality I judge my own arrogance but will not admit to this, so I project this quality unto those around me.

To quote Jung: "Although, with insight and good will, the shadow can to

some extent be assimilated into the conscious personality, experience shows that there are certain features which offer the most obstinate resistance to moral control and prove almost impossible to influence. These resistances are usually bound up with projections,, which are not recognized as such, and their recognition is a moral achievement beyond the ordinary. [...] He must be convinced that he throws a very long shadow before he is willing to withdraw his emotionally-toned projections from their object.”

Of course my arrogance will stem from feelings of low self-esteem, but we need not go down that rabbit hole just yet. For now let's stick to the example of projecting arrogance onto the other, which may go on for a while... however, all of my repressed contents will soon come to me in dreams, nightmares, or even in visions, since I did not come to terms with them. Sooner or later there comes a time when I realize my own arrogance and its implications through self-reflection. I may start to wonder what else I have been repressing -- this is the beginning of the shadow work.

### **Disintegration of the persona & withdrawal of shadow projections**

I will then come to realize that the persona I was bringing forward to the world is merely a convenient illusion of which I thought it would hide my inner demons from the sight of others. It is through this disintegration of the persona that one's ego comes to be laid bare and defenseless, which is when a person will be fully confronted with his or her shadow.

This facet of the process is in essence a "withdrawal of shadow projections"; the withdrawal of projections marks the beginning of the integration of one's personal unconscious into consciousness. What was once attributed to other people is suddenly observed to be actually judgments about oneself.

When a person realizes that all of the contents that were once split off or projected onto others are in reality judgments about oneself, that all of these projections were actually attributes not of the other but of oneself, then for sure this will be a defeat for the ego.

This process whereby one is put face to face with one's own demons can be a lot to take in, but according to Jung this process is a necessary step on the road to self-knowledge, not only for the betterment of oneself, but also for that of the world: "The best political, social, and spiritual work we can do is to withdraw the projection of our shadow onto others."

It is quite common that at this stage a "darkening" of the personality commences, a "dark night of the soul" in which one fully comes to realize one's own inadequacies – gaining insight into oneself is not always a picnic. Everything comes with a price, especially self-realization, for which we pay the price of the shedding of illusions; one must be willing to suffer this pain conscientiously in order to achieve a sense of wholeness.

### **The importance of facing one's inner darkness**

In relation to the importance of this confrontation with one's shadow side of psychic life, Jung wrote the following:

"Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves. The acceptance of oneself is the essence of the whole moral problem and the epitome of a whole outlook on life. That I feed the hungry, that I forgive an insult, that I love my enemy in the name of Christ -- all these are undoubtedly great virtues. What I do unto the least of my brethren, that I do unto Christ.

"But what if I should discover that the least among them all, the poorest of all the beggars, the most impudent of all the offenders, the very enemy himself - - that these are within me, and that I myself stand in need of the alms of my own kindness -- that I myself am the enemy who must be loved -- what then?

"As a rule, the Christian's attitude is then reversed; there is no longer any question of love or long-suffering; we say to the brother within us "Raca," and condemn and rage against ourselves. We hide him from the world; we deny ever having met this least among the lowly in ourselves, and had it been God himself who drew near to us in this despicable form, we should have

denied him a thousand times before a single cock had crowed.”

However, Jung noted: “No tree, it is said, can grow to heaven unless its roots reach down to hell. Nobody can fall so low unless he has a great depth. If such a thing can happen to a man, it challenges his best and highest on the other side; that is to say, this depth corresponds to a potential height, and the blackest darkness to a hidden light.”

It is after the night that comes day, and it is through acceptance of our inner darkness that we may come to see our light: “We only gain merit and psychological development by accepting ourselves as we are and by being serious enough to live the lives we are entrusted with. Our sins, errors and mistakes are necessary to us, otherwise we are deprived of the most precious incentives to development.”

### **Inflated ego & the will to power**

Upon contact with the personal unconscious there are multiple scenarios that may unfold. To humbly suffer the realizations is preferable, however, this is not always the conscious attitude towards the insights. Since unpleasurable contents must be integrated from the unconscious into consciousness, what may commence is that in order to protect one's ego from the harsh reality of these insights, one may try to strengthen the ego (often unconsciously), instead of accepting the information.

This is the point in psychological development that has been called ‘inflation of the ego’, which means in a slight sense simply a narcissistic defense mechanism, in more extreme cases it is also known as delusions of grandeur; however, in the most extreme cases it may manifest as psychosis.

When the personal nature of the insights is not sufficiently realized - for example through therapy - then a person may start to identify as a messiah. This identification may give rise to a messiah complex, or, the feeling that a person is a messenger of God. It may even culminate in a subjective feeling of apotheosis, i.e., identification as a divinity.

While there is something to be said of viewing yourself as a channel for inspiration, as divine or part of divinity, etc. (which we shall discuss later), there is in this process a grave danger, namely: if a person believes he is a messiah or even God himself, that kind of thing, then one must fight to keep up this illusion; one will have to fight to prove that this is so.

He or she shall have to defend himself from those who feel otherwise, which is what ultimately led to Jesus's crucifixion. Aside from this troubling aspect of the identification it may also lead to religious fanaticism, where "the enemy" must be taken care of.

But even if there is acceptance of the personal unconscious the danger of inflation still lurks around the corner -- there is another way in which the ego may come to megalomaniac proportions. These insights into oneself namely are not just insights into oneself, but into everyone, so to speak. This is because the unconscious contents that were made conscious can now easily be observed not only in oneself, but in others as well. All of these patterns are suddenly visible in everyone which grants a sense of power, a feeling of having some form of insight into others that they themselves do not have.

### **Hubris, "Quis Ut Deus" & the fall**

While this power may be used for good, it is not seldomly that a person will (want to) use the power to their own advantage, to lord it over others -- so we see this too might cause inflation. In this particular case it may be called hubris or spiritual pride -- where one is rendered "power drunk" by insight, and everyone knows that "pride goeth before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall". Hubris is what caused the fall of Lucifer, it is exactly what cast him into hell.

It is not uncommon that having the power to influence reality in a way that was impossible before is accompanied by feelings of grandeur or even of being "unto God". In the bible, in the book Revelations, we read how the

archangel Michael defeats the serpent of chaos, Satan. In depictions of this event often there's the credo "Quis Ut Deus" on Michael's shield -- a translation of his name meaning "who is like God?". Only God is unto Himself, and a person who thinks himself unto God will in the end be quite disillusioned, having to face the same fate as Satan by way of a psychological mechanism.

The unconscious mind is said by Jung to stand in a complementary function to consciousness, thus, it produces dreams and fantasies that seemingly contradict (complement) a person's conscious mental state, in order to retain a certain balance in a person's mind. If one ascends too high, trying to transcend nature or even God, one must fall, for it is man's fate to walk the earth.

In order to accomplish this fall we observe how the unconscious produces (or rather brings forward) nightmarish contents which are continuously catapulted into consciousness. Only one who is truly "unto God" will be able to stand such visions without succumbing, others will surely succumb to the chaos. The situation thus is "out of one's hands" -- in the end it feels as if only the help of an archangel (or something like it) will be sufficient to deal with "the serpent".

It is through this process - through the frightening experience of being dominated by and dependent on previously unknown forces - that a person will come to see how the mind is a partly autonomous entity. The psyche is able to trick and dominate a person, where before one felt like he or she was in full control. Jung wrote: "We must not underestimate the devastating effect of getting lost in the chaos, even if we know that it is the 'essential condition' of any regeneration of the spirit and the personality."

One comes to see that we do not hold all the power of a God -- there are things in nature which dwarf us in every aspect and that demand our respect. It is through this process that the ego again deflates.



### **The symbolic re-birthing process**

What is left out of this description is the process of deflation, which is not always a smooth gradient between inflation and a deflated state; no, it can also be a full disintegration of the ego, after which a new one forms. This is what is symbolically alluded to throughout myths where the rebirth motif is prevalent. Something must die, namely the old ego, for a new self to be reborn from the ashes. To quote Jung: "Every transformation demands as its precondition "the ending of a world" -- the collapse of an old philosophy of life."

So we see order is again born from chaos, the shattered ego with all the debris is picked up and pieced back together. To quote Jung: "I had first to come to the fundamental realization that analysis, in so far as it is reduction and nothing more, must necessarily be followed by synthesis, and that certain kinds of psychic material mean next to nothing if simply broken down, but display a wealth of meaning if, instead of being broken down, that meaning is reinforced and extended by all the conscious means at our disposal."

Jung however warned us about what he called the "regressive restoration of the persona", where a person has been left so devastated he or she is afraid to be the person they used to be; to be as brave or bold as they once were. A compromise is made which entails becoming a lesser version of whom one previously was. Usually though the "piecing back" will (in the end) give rise to a more wholesome personality that is wiser and humbler than before.

Jung noted: "The unconscious is not a demoniacal monster, but a natural entity which, as far as moral sense, aesthetic taste, and intellectual judgement go, is completely neutral. It only becomes dangerous when our conscious attitude to it is hopelessly wrong. To the degree that we repress it, its danger increases. But the moment a person begins to assimilate contents that were previously unconscious, its danger diminishes. The dissociation of personality, the anxious division of the day-time and the night-time sides of the psyche, cease with progressive assimilation."

When a person learns to accept his or her shadow side and is no longer fully dominated by it then one will find that what was once feared can actually be a source of insight and of much inspiration. Since we are then no longer a stranger to ourselves there is less of a need to continuously defend and protect this self from “invasions from without”.

By coming to terms with the shadow side of our personality we get to know these facets of ourselves that we once tried to desperately hide from others, which inhibited us from truly opening up. That’s why Jung wrote: “But the shadow is merely somewhat inferior, primitive, maladapted, and awkward; not wholly bad. It even contains childish or primitive qualities which would in a way vitalize and embellish human existence.”

Jung adds: “We cannot change anything unless we accept it. Condemnation does not liberate; it oppresses. Real liberation comes not from glossing over or repressing painful states of feeling, but only from experiencing them to the full. One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.”

The encounter with the personal unconscious is now completed, however, the analytical work itself is not. There is more to be investigated.